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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR KDEM SOCI ECON EAID UN IZ
SUBJECT: PRT ANBAR: UNAMI VISITS ANBAR TO DISCUSS
DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND TO EXAMINE ELECTIONS PREPARATIONS

Classified By: PRT Anbar Team Leader Jim Soriano
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: A small UNAMI delegation visited Ramadi on May 27 with a dual purpose: to hold talks with provincial officials on economic development in advance of the expected establishment of a permanent UNAMI presence in the province and to make an unannounced call on the Governorate Election Office (GEO) in Ramadi. The economic development part of the delegation was led by Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General David Shearer. In meetings with Governor Ma'amoun and the Provincial Council, he discussed the economic challenges facing the province, especially inadequate infrastructure. He also sought to lower Anbari expectations as to the amount of UN development funds that Anbar might receive, and instead emphasized a UNAMI role for technical assistance, capacity building, and intercession with the GOI to obtain Iraqi funds for the province.

¶3. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUED: During a separate meeting, UNAMI elections officer Sandra Mitchell visited the GEO to discuss allegations that it was biased in favor of the governing Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). She found the office well run and was favorably impressed with it. She later met at Camp Ramadi with Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, leader of the Iraq Awakening Movement, who alleges that the GEO is politicized in favor of the IIP. UNAMI told Ahmed that any allegation of GEO wrongdoing must be substantiated with evidence, which the Awakening has not yet provided. Nonetheless, UNAMI offered to arrange a meeting between the Awakening and the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) to discuss the matter in further detail. END SUMMARY.

UNAMI Delegation

¶4. (C) David Shearer, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General and the Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in Iraq, led a small delegation of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) to Ramadi on May 27. The visit had two objectives: to discuss economic development needs with local officials in advance of UNAMI's establishment of a permanent presence in Anbar, and to make an unannounced call on the Governorate Election Office (GEO). The delegation split into two parts, with UNAMI elections advisor Sandra Mitchell leading an unannounced visit to the GEO, while Shearer went to the Government Center for substantive talks with Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed and to call on the Provincial Council, which was in session. He was accompanied by Deputy Resident Representative for UNDP Basil Comnas, UNAMI humanitarian and reconstruction official Tom White, and the PRT leader.

Meeting at the Governor's Office

¶5. (C) Shearer spent more than two hours with the Governor

and several dozen directors general (DG) discussing the economic challenges facing the province. Three themes emerged in that meeting:

-- The decrepit state of infrastructure. Ma'amoun observed that many of Anbar's infrastructure problems are the result of bad central economic planning, which he held responsible for the province's shortages of electricity, fuel, and potable water. On the latter issue, Ma'amoun said that the province has used a substantial part of its capital-expenditure budget since 2006 to address water purification needs that should be a GOI responsibility. The DGs for urban planning, health, and education each told Shearer of the capital investment shortfalls in their respective areas. Ma'amoun saw the private sector as part of the solution to key infrastructure challenges.

-- Untapped economic potential. Despite the litany of economic woes, several interlocutors observed that the province nonetheless has unrealized potential in agriculture, natural gas, and minerals. Ma'amoun cited the province's location as a strategic asset, with major transportation links to Syria and Jordan, as well as the prospect of re-opening the Free Zone at the Syrian border town of Al-Qaim.

-- Central and provincial government relations. The Governor and several other Anbaris commented on the inadequate level of GOI financial and policy support. Ma'amoun criticized the Ministry of Agriculture for being virtually absent from the scene; the Ministry of Industry and Minerals, which purportedly has allowed several state-owned companies to languish; and the Ministry of Oil, for what he regarded as

BAGHDAD 00001641 002 OF 003

its slowness in developing the Akkas gas field. Both Ma'amoun and the Deputy Governor observed that GOI support has been so deficient that some ministries have not even provided their local DGs with adequate office space and equipment.

Meeting with the Provincial Council

¶6. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting at the Governor's office, Ma'amoun escorted Shearer and his group to the Provincial Council (PC) chamber, where the body was in session. In his opening comments to the PC, Shearer reaffirmed UNAMI's intention to establish a permanent presence in Anbar, but also sought to lower expectations as to the amount of financial assistance the UN might bring to bear in Anbar. For his part, Provincial Council Chairman Abdulsalam Abdullah avoided listing a series of economic and infrastructure complaints, but instead keyed his remarks on UNAMI's future role as a sort of lobbyist for Anbari needs with the GOI. His point was that Anbar looks forward to a relationship with UNAMI not so much to bring in additional UN resources, but to help represent the province's interests in Baghdad.

Article 140 Issue

¶7. (C) Abdulsalam turned to Sheikh Lawrence Al-Neiza, the tribal leader and Mayor of Nukhayb, a desert oasis town 120 miles southwest of Ramadi, who expressed Anbari fears that some Shi'a political factions are seeking to detach the Nukhayb area from Anbar and assign it to Karbala in order to give it a land corridor to the Saudi border. Shearer responded that he was aware of the issue, but that as a reconstruction and development official, he was not in a position to present a formal reply. He indicated that he would bring the matter to the attention of the UNAMI political office in Baghdad.

UNAMI's Presentation

¶ 8. (C) At the meetings with the Governor and the Provincial Council, Shearer and UNDP official Comnas sought to lower Anbari expectations of a large inflow of UN development funds. Shearer noted that UN donors typically regard Iraq as an oil-rich country and are puzzled by UN requests for more assistance. Comnas echoed that theme, alluding to "donor fatigue."

¶ 9. (C) Both officials stressed that while the sums of UN money earmarked for Anbar will not be large, UNAMI can provide technical expertise and help build the province's capacity for project management. It could also intercede with the GOI for additional resources. Shearer said that the UNAMI presence would be small (five or six UN employees), but declined to speculate as to when it might be set up.

Unannounced Visit on the GEO

¶ 10. (C) While Shearer and his group were meeting with the Governor and Provincial Council, UNAMI elections official Sandra Mitchell made a surprise call on the GEO in downtown Ramadi. No Coalition representative accompanied her. Mitchell later told the PRT staff that virtually all the GEO employees were on the job, the office appeared busy, and that the Anbar GEO, Khalid Raghab Abdul-Razak, was genuinely surprised when she announced herself unexpectedly at the door.

¶ 11. (C) Mitchell told Khalid that the purpose of her visit was to inquire into allegations that the GEO was controlled by the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), the Province's dominate political grouping, and thus biased against the Ramadi-based Awakening Movement of Iraq, or Sahwa Al-Iraq (SAI). Khalid assured Mitchell of no such bias, and pointed to the fact that several GEO employees were members of the Abu Risha tribe, which is the tribe of SAI leader, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha.

¶ 12. (C) Mitchell told us later that the GEO seems to be well run, there was no sign non-employees idling about, or of paraphernalia for this or that political party. She found Khalid's responses to her inquiries reasonable, but urged him to hold joint meetings with all political entities registered in the Province so as to underscore transparency. She welcomed the fact that several GEO employees had previous experience working on the 2005 election.

BAGHDAD 00001641 003 OF 003

Meeting with SAI

¶ 13. (C) At the end of the workday, Shearer and Mitchell met at Camp Ramadi with a group of SAI representatives led by Sheikh Ahmed. UNAMI sought the meeting in order to hear SAI's election complaints first hand. In his opening comments, Sheikh Ahmed expressed support for early provincial elections, and said that the province would "suffer" if they were not held. He asserted that both the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and Anbar's GEO were politicized. He expressed misgivings that the GEO is controlled by the IIP, and as evidence charged that some GEO employees in various cities are known IIP members or related to prominent IIP members. He suggested that, for fairness, UNAMI should appoint Anbar's GEO employees.

¶ 14. (C) In response, Mitchell acknowledged receiving several SAI letters about its concerns about the GEO; however, she pressed Ahmed and the other SAI representatives for details on any alleged wrongdoing. At several points in the conversation, Mitchell stressed that to date SAI has presented only allegations of GEO bias without substantive evidence. She explained that UNAMI plays only an advisory role, and that decisions on GEO staffing are approved by

IHEC: UNAMI can facilitate and present advice, but IHEC makes the decisions. Both she and Shearer explained that IHEC would insist on concrete evidence of any partisan bias if it examined the operation of any GEO. Mitchell offered to use her good offices to arrange a meeting in Baghdad between IHEC officials and SAI if such an encounter would clear the air. SAI signaled its intention to take her up on the offer.

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